

Insights into Halacha

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The Rarest Year of Them All (part one)

As we enter the second month of the new year, with the CHARVOT BARZEL (Iron Swords) and CHITZEI TZAFON (Northern Arrows) wars in Eretz Yisrael still raging, aside from our davening for the safe return of the hostages and Refuah Sh'leima for all of the wounded, we surely are continually davening for the Gemara's aphorism of TICHLEH SHANA U'KLALOTEHA, "May the year and its curses end" (Megila 31b) and its addendum, TACHEL SHANA U'VIRCHOTEHA, "May the New Year and its blessings be ushered in, to rapidly come true. But in fact, our New Year is not just a standard new year.

Indeed, the year we have begun, 5785, is not only a rare one, but calendarically speaking, actually the hands-down rarest of them all. You see 5785 is classified as a HEI-SHIN-ALEF year in our calendars. This abbreviation is referring to Rosh Hashana beginning on Thursday (HEI), both months of Marcheshvan and Kislev being SHALEIM (SHIN - 30 day); these are the only months that can switch off in our set calendar),

and Pesach falling out on Sunday (ALEF).

Ed. note: the other coding system for years has 5785 being a PEI-HEI-SHIN, PEI for P'shuta (12 months, one Adar), Thursday start of RH, and SHIN for SHALEIM.

A HEI-SHIN-ALEF year is the rarest of years, and out of the 14 possibilities in our fixed calendar - occurring on average only once in about 30.19 years (approx. 3.3% of the time). Indeed, at times there are 71 years(!) between HEI-SHIN-ALEF years. The last time this year type occurred was 31 years ago in 5754/1993-1994. The next time will be 20 years hence in 5805/2044-2045.

The reasons and rules governing the whys and whens this transpires are too complicated for this discussion; suffice to say that when the Mishna Berura discusses these issues he writes EIN KAN MAKOM L'HA'ARICH, that this is not the place to expound in detail, which is certainly good enough for this author.

Obviously, such a rare calendar year will contain many rare occurrences. This article series sets out to detail many of them. Perhaps as we get nearer to the actual events, we will discuss them in greater detail.

Three Tishrei 3-Day Yom Tovs (in Chutz LaAretz).

The first remarkability of this year that many, especially those of us in

Chutz La'aretz will notice, is that all of the Tishrei-based Yomim Tovim are "3-Day Yom Tovs" (with the exception of Yom Kippur – which also has a change from the norm; it falls out on Shabbat this year, supplanting Shabbat *almost* entirely due to it being Shabbat Shabbaton). This is referring to when Yom Tov either is immediately preceded by Shabbat [which will occur this year with Pesach; more on that later in the article], or will conclude with Shabbat's entrance. In Tishrei alone, as Rosh HaShana commenced on a Thursday, so did Sukkot, a fortnight later, as did Shemini Atzere, a week later. As Rosh HaShana is always observed as a two-day Yom Tov worldwide – this means that even in Eretz Yisrael, 5785 started off with a Three Day Yom Tov. In Chutz La'aretz, there are four Three Day Yom Tovs observed this year – Three in Tishrei, and the beginning of Pesach as well. That fact alone should make us sit up and take notice as to this year's exceptionality.

Eruv Tavshilin x 3

Along with Three- Day Yom Tovs ending on Shabbat comes along an important institution – that of Eruv Tavshilin. Anytime Yom Tov falls on Friday, an Eruv Tavshilin must be made on Erev Yom Tov to permit cooking and other preparations on Yom Tov for Shabbat. Although

cooking is permitted on Yom Tov, one may only prepare food for consumption on that Yom Tov. There is, however, one exceptional situation – one may cook on a Friday Yom Tov for Shabbat, but only if one makes an Eruv Tavshilin the day before Yom Tov.

Fact is, making an Eruv Tavshilin is much more common in Chutz La'aretz than it is in Eretz Yisrael. Since, in our calendar devised by Hillel II, the beginning of Sukkot, Pesach, and Shmini Atzeret never fall on Friday, the only time there is a need for an Eruv Tavshilin in Eretz Yisrael is when Shavuot or the seventh day of Pesach falls on Friday, or, like this year, when Rosh HaShana falls on Thursday. On the other hand, in Chutz La'aretz, in addition to these instances, often the two days of Yom Tov fall on Thursday and Friday. Hence, practically speaking, one Eruv Tavshilin is performed this year in Eretz Yisrael, whereas in Chutz La'aretz three will be necessary – in Tishrei alone.

Marcheshvan – Kislev Calculations

As we move into the month of Marcheshvan, a bit of background is in order to explain the significance of Marcheshvan and Kislev both being SHALEIM this year.

As is well known from Chazal, and actually millennia later corroborated

by NASA, the Lunar Month is 29 days, 12 hours and 793 chalakim (or 44 minutes and one cheilek; a cheilik equals three and a third seconds, an 18th of a minute, or a 1080th of an hour). In the times of Chazal, based on eyewitness accounts of the New Moon, any month could have had 30 days (called a CHODESH MALEI or SHALEIM - full month) or 29 days (referred to as a CHOSESH CHASEIR). In our 19-year cycle Jewish calendar established by Hillel II, months alternate between 30 and 29 days. Whereas the Gregorian calendar maxim might be "Thirty Days has September, April, June, and November...", but in the Jewish calendar the colloquialism would probably be "Thirty Days has Tishrei, Sh'vat, Nissan, Sivan, and Av. However, Tevet, Adar (regular and the Adar Sheini when we have it), Iyar, Tamuz, and Elul only have 29 days."

An easy way to tell if the month you are in has 29 or 30 days is by seeing how many days of Rosh Chodesh the following month has. If it has two days of Rosh Chodesh, that means the first day of Rosh Chodesh is actually the 30th day of the preceding month. This means that the preceding month (the one you are currently in) is a MALEI. If the following month only has one day of Rosh Chodesh, then the preceding month only has 29 days and is

categorized as a CHASEIR.

Wild Cards?

As you probably realized, there were two months missing from the "adage of the months". Marcheshvan and Kislev were not mentioned. The reason is that they are not fixed at either 29 or 30 days. They are the only months that can either have 29 or 30 days depending on the year. Some years both are chaseirim; other years both are malei'im, and others Marcheshvan is chaseir and Kislev malei. What is a given, is that this is one of the changing variables in our set calendar. As mentioned previously, in 5785 both months are MALEI - making this a shaleim year.

Delayed Shabbat-R"Ch Haftara?

The first Shabbat Rosh Chodesh of 5785 will be Rosh Chodesh Marcheshvan, Parashat No'ach - on which the haftara for Shabbat Rosh Chodesh HASHAMAYIM KISI will be read. However, although there are two more Shabbatot Rosh Chodesh in store for us this year, nonetheless, this special haftara will not be read for another year and a half. The second Shabbat Rosh Chodesh this year, Rosh Chodesh Adar, will be Parashat Sh'kalim, which as one of the Arba Parshiyot, knocks off any other haftara. Yet, the third occurrence of Shabbat Rosh Chodesh, on Shabbat Rosh Chodesh Av, is when it

gets interesting.

As we know, most haftarot share some similarity with at least one concept presented in the Torah reading. The Gemara in Megila discusses the proper haftara readings for the various holidays throughout the year. The Gemara states that whenever Rosh Chodesh falls out on Shabbat, the special haftara of HASHAMAYIM KISI is read, as it mentions both the inyanim of Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh.

Head-To-HeadHaftarot

Our dilemma arises when that rule goes head-to-head with another rule. The Pesikta (an early Midrash cited by many early authorities) continues the teachings of Chazal as to the proper haftara readings starting from the Fast of Shiv'a Asar b'Tamuz.

During the 'Three Weeks', we read T'LATA D'PARANUTA, '3 Readings of Misfortune'. After Tish'a b'Av (starting with Shabbat Nachamu until RoshHashana, SHIVA D'NECHEMTA, or 'Seven Readings of Consolation' are read. This is followed by a reading of Teshuva, during the Shabbat between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, aptly named SHABBAT SHUVA, for its repentance themed haftara starting with 'Shuva Yisrael'. The Abudraham as well as Rabbeinu Tam, conclude that these special haftara readings are so important,

that they are never pushed off!

The \$64,000 question becomes, what happens when Rosh Chodesh Av falls out on Shabbat? Which ruling trumps which? Do we follow the Gemara or the Pesikta? Do we stick with the T'LATA D'PARANUTA or the special Rosh Chodesh reading?

The answer is that there is no easy answer! The Beis Yosef writes that the ikar halacha follows the Abudraham as he was considered the expert in these topics. Consequently, in the Shulchan Aruch, he only mentions that during the "Three Weeks" the T'LATA D'PARANUTA are read. Hence on Shabbat Rosh Chodesh Av, the Sefardic minhag is to only read the regularly scheduled haftara of "Misfortune": SHIMU (along with the first and last pasuk of HASHAMAYIM KISI).

Prague vs. Posen

Yet, figuring out the Ashkenazic minhag is not so simple. Aside from this being a divergence of minhag between the the cities of Prague and Posen, as well as a machloket Rishonim, it is also a machloket of Tosafot in different Masechtot. And although several Poskim conclude that whichever of the two haftarot is read is fine, nevertheless, the majority consensus seems to be that the minhag to read SHIMU is the most prevalent, following the Mishna

Berura's citing of the Vilna Gaon's position as the final word on the matter. Although in other year-types Sefardic and Ashkenazic minhag diverge on this point, nonetheless, on a practical level, this year, they concur.

Accordingly, to most of the world, the special Shabbat Rosh Chodesh haftara of HASHAMAYIM KISI will not be read from the beginning of 5785 all the way until Parasha Tazria-Metzora, Shabbat R"Ch Iyar 5786 - eighteen months later.

Similarly, this year regarding MACHAR CHODESH, the special haftara ordinarily read on Shabbat right before a Sunday Rosh Chodesh, which will be read as the haftara for Parashat To-I'dot, and will not be read again until Parashat Bamidbar 5786, a year and a half later.

Early Tal U'Matar

Although in Eretz Yisrael we start the recital of the request for rain V'TEIN TAL U'MATAR LIVRACHA on 7 Marcheshvan, nonetheless in Chutz La'aretz this addition to our Shemoneh Esrei only starts 60 days after the start of halachic autumn - T'KUFAt TISHREI, which generally falls out in the middle or end of Kislev. According to the Gregorian calendar, from 1900 until the year 2100, this occurs on the night preceding December 5th (except in

the December preceding a solar leap year, when it is the night preceding December 6th) when at Maariv we start saying 'V'tein Tal U'Matar Livracha.' Either way, the corresponding date in our Luach, this year occurs quite early, on 4 Kislev. As noted by calendar expert R' Yosef Yehuda Weber, the last time this occurred this early in our Luach was 20 years ago in 5766/2005. The next time it will be this early will be in another 19 years in 5804/2043. Although this 'calendar quirk' does not have halachic import, it is quite unusual.

Our fascinating journey detailing the many remarkable facets of our rare year will IY"Y be continued...

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch famously wrote that "the Jew's catechism is his calendar." It is this author's wish that by showcasing the uniqueness of our calendar year and its rare minhagim, this article will help raise appreciation of them and our fascinating calendrical customs.

For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomot / sources, please email the author: yspitz@ohr.edu

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Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority.

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz's English halacha sefer, "Food: A Halachic Analysis" (Mosaica/ Feldheim) containing over 500 pages featuring over 30 comprehensive chapters discussing the myriad halachic issues pertaining to food, is now available online and in bookstores everywhere."

Editor's note: An additional unique point about 5785 is noteworthy because it might be the only time it ever happens. This year is written as HEI' TAV-SHIN-PEI-HEI. The SHIN matches SHALEIM, the PEI matches P'SHUTA, and the HEI matches the Thursday Rosh HaShana. I haven't found another year that has that match.